

World and Nation

Police pull dissident from banquet

From Associated Press reports

BEIJING — Police blocked China's leading dissident from attending a banquet held by President Bush on Sunday, then tailed him for an hour and a half after ordering a taxi and a bus not to pick him up.

Bush had invited Fang Lizhi, an internationally respected astrophysicist, as a gesture of support for Chinese intellectuals who have called for greater political freedom. White House officials said.

"This really shows China's attitude toward human rights," Fang said later in a telephone interview.

He described the police action as "weak and scared" and added, "All I wanted to do was shake the hands of the president and Mrs. Bush."

It was not immediately known whether Bush knew Fang was blocked from attending the Texas-style barbecue.

As the banquet ended, a reporter yelled, "Mr. President, what about human rights?" Bush smiled but did not answer.

White House National security adviser Brent Scowcroft said later,

"Well the president, of course, would hope that all of his guests would be allowed to attend the dinner, of course."

The police action came about an hour after Communist Party leader Zhao Ziyang said U.S. support of Chinese activism could harm relations between the countries.

Perry Link, director of the U.S. Academy of Sciences office in Beijing, said he and his wife were driving Fang and his wife, Li Shuxian, to the banquet when police stopped them several blocks away for an alleged traffic violation.

They walked to the hotel, but outside the entrance "suddenly a swarm of plainclothes policemen surrounded us, pulling Fang Lizhi and his wife and me and my wife apart," Link said.

He said the officers told Fang he was not on the guest list. The official guest list distributed at the banquet included Fang's name.

The couples then walked to a nearby hotel to get a taxi, but police stopped the taxi from picking up the

group and then flagged down a bus and ordered it to drive by the four, Link said.

The four walked an hour and a half to the residence of the U.S. Ambassador to China, Winston Lord, and were followed all the way by police, some plainclothes officers and others in marked cars, Link said.

A Canadian diplomat saw them outside the locked residence and drove them to his home, Link said. "I was astounded by the scope of the net that had been put out for us," Link said.

He said he discussed the problem with the U.S. Embassy, but embassy officials denied Link spoke to them.

Several hours later, Fang held an impromptu news conference at a Beijing hotel. He refused to criticize Bush for not pressing Chinese authorities to correct human rights abuses, saying, "I have no comment because he is just beginning." However, he said the United States should not hold the Soviet Union to one human rights standard and other countries to another.

With his wife, Li Shuxian, by his

side, Fang said he had no plans to halt his calls for democracy. "It's a normal thing to attend a banquet, but the authorities here are afraid of even that," Fang said, holding aloft his banquet tickets.

Western diplomats said Chinese authorities had put "heavy pressure" on Fang not to accept the banquet invitation.

White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said earlier that Fang was invited "as an astrophysicist, an outstanding person in his field, and also because of his human rights stand."

He said it was unlikely Bush would have talked with Fang.

Fang gained international prominence when he was blamed for inciting pro-democracy student demonstrations that spread throughout China in early 1986 and 1987.

He was expelled from the Communist Party and fired from his job as professor at an Anhui province university. He has since been transferred to a job at the Beijing University observatory.

Israel signs over beach resort to Egypt, ends border dispute

From Associated Press reports

TABA, Israeli-Held Sinai — Israel and Egypt signed a historic agreement Sunday that will turn the Taba desert beach strip over to Egypt and end a seven-year border dispute that has marred relations.

The agreement calling for Israel to withdraw from the 250-acre resort by March 15 was signed at the Sonesta hotel in Taba, northern Sinai.

Both sides joined U.S. mediators in expressing hope that future disputes between Israel and its Arab neighbors can be solved through negotiations.

"A new chapter is starting, and we sincerely hope it will lead to the road of a comprehensive peace," said Egypt's chief negotiator, Nabil El-Araby.

His Israeli counterpart, Foreign Ministry Director-General Reuven Merhav, added: "It is a splendid example and a shining beacon of hope. We in Israel believe negotiations are the only possible path to peace."

A key point of the accord will allow Israelis to visit the resort for up to 14 days without visas or special entry fees. Israel also will continue supplying water and electricity to the area.

U.S. troops to stay in Seoul

SEOUL, South Korea — President Bush, calling the United States "a faithful friend and a dependable ally" of South Korea, said Monday he has no plans to reduce U.S. troops stationed in this strife-torn nation, the last stop on a whirlwind five-day Asian tour.

"They will remain in the Republic of Korea as long as they are needed and as long as we believe it is in the interest of peace," Bush said in remarks prepared for a speech to the National Assembly.

Bush's visit came amid unusually stringent security because of a rash of recent anti-American demonstrations. The president made no mention of the often-violent protests in his prepared remarks but focused on the history of the U.S. military presence that Korean radicals want removed.

Bush headed here after a two-

News in Brief

day visit to China, whose troops fought on the side of North Korea in that 1950s conflict.

Tower makes pledge on TV

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary-designate John Tower said Sunday that he is not an alcoholic and issued an extraordinary pledge not to take a single drink if he is confirmed by the Senate.

"I hereby swear and undertake that if confirmed, during the course of my tenure as Secretary of Defense, I will not consume beverage alcohol of any type or form, including wine, beer or spirits of any kind," Tower said in a statement he read on ABC-TV's "This Week with David Brinkley."

The Senate Armed Services Committee voted 11-9 last Thursday to recommend that the full Senate reject Tower's nomination, with panel chairman Sen. Sam Nunn, D-Ga., citing allegations of excessive drinking from an FBI report on the nominee.

Namibia to gain independence

WINDHOEK, Namibia — About 3,000 Namibian guerrilla supporters Sunday welcomed the chief of the U.N. peacekeeping force that will oversee the transition of Africa's last colony into an independent nation.

India's Lt. Gen. Dewan Premchand arrived in Windhoek, the Namibian capital, a week ahead of the first troops he will command as head of the military component of the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG).

The only exception to the warm welcome were complaints by some supporters of the guerrilla South-West African People's Organization that the United Nations decided to send only 4,650 troops to Namibia rather than the 7,500 sought by the guerrilla organization and other African countries.

They are to keep peace when the independence process begins April 1 in the territory South Africa has ruled for 74 years.

Nine die when airplane door rips open

From Associated Press reports

HONOLULU — A failed lock may have caused the cargo door of a United Airlines jumbo jet to pop open at 22,000 feet, ripping a huge hole up the side of the plane and sending nine passengers to their deaths, federal investigators say.

Damage to the plane is consistent with the cargo door popping open under pressurization of the cabin as the jet gained altitude and atmospheric pressure outside the aircraft declined, National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigator Lee Dickinson said at a late Saturday news conference.

Coast Guard cutters and aircraft officials continued their search Sunday 100 miles south of here for more debris from the plane as more than 70 people, including 16 from the NTSB, investigated the cause of the accident.

But Coast Guard Lt. Brad Nelson said the search was hampered by high seas and probably would be called in after sunset Sunday. "The search is winding down," he said. "There's

probably not a lot more that can be picked up."

United Airlines Flight 811, carrying 354 people, had taken off Friday for New Zealand and was about 100 miles from Honolulu when the fuselage ripped open over the Pacific Ocean. Nine passengers were sucked out and are presumed dead.

The pilot lost power in one of the four engines and shut down another when a fire indicator light went on, but the plane returned safely to Honolulu.

United announced Sunday that it had begun a series of special maintenance checks on its aircraft, United Chairman Stephen Wolf said the maintenance checks are "over and above (United's) existing procedures and those required by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)."

He also said an FAA-licensed mechanic will inspect each 747 cargo door after a landing and will oversee the closing of each 747 cargo door before departures. The closings have been handled by ramp personnel, his statement said.

Two cutters returned to port Sunday morning with items recovered by then, including part of an overhead compartment, a section of fuselage and two seats.

Also found were safety instruction cards and personal items including shoes and a teddy bear, said Lt. Cmdr. Paul Ellner, a Coast Guard spokesman.

No bodies have been found, officials said.

Michael Marx, the NTSB's senior metallurgist, said there was no evidence that metal fatigue weakness caused gradually by long-term use caused the hole in the 18-year-old jet, United's oldest Boeing 747.

Marx said the hole's edge indicated that "overstress," a stress greater than the plane could stand, had been placed on the aircraft, but he did not say what it might have been.

"If a door opened in flight, it could possibly cause overstress," Dickinson said in response to a question. Dickinson added that the condition could be caused by other factors he declined to explain.

"It's typical of an overload," Marx said.

The hole follows the dimensions of the cargo door and flares further up the aircraft, Dickinson said.

The Federal Aviation Administration in July ordered airlines to improve cargo door lock systems on older Boeing 747s after a door in one plane partly opened in flight.

United had inspected all 25 of its jets covered by the order but had completed the required modifications on just six by last week, spokesman Russell Mack said in Chicago. The plane in last week's accident was not one of the six, he said.

Dickinson said the pilot and co-pilot told investigators Saturday there was no indication of trouble closing the cargo doors. Dickinson said a warning light in the cockpit would have indicated if the doors were not closed properly.

FBI agents searched the cargo area with dogs and found no evidence of explosives, Dickinson said.

"Nothing yet gives us any indication of a bomb in the cargo area, but we are not drawing any conclusions yet," he said.



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